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Fiber and Fabric in the Clothes We Wear

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Nov. 18, 1941 A broadcast by Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, Mr. D. E. J. 1941 ★
Rowell and Mr. Duke DuMars, Office of Information, broadcast Tuesday, November 18, 1941, in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, ¹⁸ Culture by stations associated with the Blue Network of the National Broadcasting Company.

--ooOoo--

DUKE DUMARS:

Now, to follow up that pledge we made last week, to aid Civilian Defense by better buying of all the things we use in our everyday living. Here's Ruth Van Deman with some facts, growing out of the textile research of the Department of Agriculture ... facts about fibers, and finishes on the fabrics in our clothes ...

All set, Ruth?

RUTH VAN DEMAN:

Just a second ... just as soon as I get these samples where you and Mike can do some identifying.

DUMARS:

Mike, I don't know how you feel. But this looks like hard work to me.

VAN DEMAN:

We won't take it the hard way. Just give a quick look and pick out a sample with wool in it.

E. J. (MIKE) ROWELL:

Can I do a little rubbing - finger-and-thumb-wise?

VAN DEMAN:

Certainly. But no fair looking at the labels on the back.

DUMARS:

This plaid piece - red, green, white, blue - a real Scotch plaid. I'm sure this has some wool in it. It might possibly have a few threads of cotton, too.

VAN DEMAN:

Look at the label.

DUMARS:

100 percent rayon ... But it feels soft and a little bit rough - like wool.

VAN DEMAN:

It's spun rayon. The long filaments chopped up into short pieces and respun into yarn. That gives the wooly look and feel.

ROWELL:

This red, kind-of knitted piece.

VAN DEMAN:

Jersey that's called.

ROWELL:

I know this is wool.

VAN DEMAN:

All wool?

ROWELL:

I'd say so. It's soft and feels very warm to the touch.

VAN DEMAN:

What about those silky little hairs on the surface? That's right, pull one right out. They'll soon come out anyways.

ROWELL:

Looks like something from a fur-bearing animal.

VAN DEMAN:

Read the label.

ROWELL:

75 percent wool ... 15 percent rayon ... 10 percent rabbit hair ... Well, well, who'd have thought we'd meet our old friend 'burr-rabbit in a piece of red dress goods.

DUMARS:

There are no rabbit hairs in this piece ... One test for wool is to chew it. And I've been chewing a thread of this.

VAN DEMAN:

What about those little dark flecks running crosswise of the goods?

ROWELL:

That's some of the black sheep showing through, maybe.

VAN DEMAN:

Good alibi. But read the label.

DUMARS:

85 percent wool - 15 percent rabbit hair.

ROWELL:

Another rabbit in sheep's clothing ... What's the idea?

VAN DEMAN:

To space out the wool I think. Wool's our highest priced natural fiber - now that silk's practically off the market.

DUMARS:

How does this wear -- this wool-rabbit's-hair combination?

VAN DENAN:

Sometimes fairly well. Sometimes not so well. It depends partly on how well the short hairs are anchored into the cloth, by the long, strong wool fibers. When it comes to giving long wear, and warmth, without being uncomfortably heavy, nothing equals long-staple wool — that is, wool spun into hard twisted yarns and woven with a good firm, even weave.

For instance, Duke, in this piece of goods you were so sure was all' wool. The rabbit hairs seem to be firmly bound in by the wool fibers. I don't see how the short hairs could work out easily. And they do give a soft, silky feel to the cloth.

But look again at that other piece.

DUMARS:

If I brushed up against this very often my clothes would look as though I'd been near a white Persian cat.

VAN DENAN:

Yes, you can almost blow some of those rabbit hairs loose. And the person who makes a dress of that material, I'm afraid will soon be embarrassed by queer-looking bare spots at the elbows, and around the neckline -- wherever the hard wear comes. I know because I had a dress of material something like that once.

ROWELL:

I'm surprised at you, Ruth. Didn't you know it would happen? Didn't you read the label?

VAN DENAN:

That was several years ago. There were practically no labels on wool dresses then to read.

DUMARS:

But there are labels on all wool goods now. The new wool labeling law went into effect last summer.

VAN DENAN:

Yes, that's why these samples I have here are so plainly marked for what they are. The wool labeling act is a definite step toward helping us to be better buyers. And it was particularly fortunate it came when it did -- just when the national defense program began to make shifts in materials going into clothes and other goods for our civilian use.

DUMARS:

Well, Ruth, one thing your little exhibit of these samples of cloth shows very plainly to me. That's the importance of reading the label ... every kind of a label.

VAN DENAN:

And if the label doesn't give facts, then don't be bashful about asking questions. Many manufacturers are willing and glad to give real facts about the qualities of their goods on labels if they can see that consumers use those facts.

DUMARS:

In other words, they need to be shown it's good business.

VAN DEMAN:

That's only fair. And with the situation on materials jumping around the way it is now, if we consumers don't know about the quality of goods before we buy, it's just too bad for us.

DUMARS:

What about those good bulletins on buying textiles and clothes your Bureau has put out? Are those still available on request?

VAN DEMAN:

Very much so, yes. Requests are rolling in every day from the new consumer information centers being set up as part of our defense program ... and from individual homemakers ... I brought along these too, as follow up on what we've said today about knowing your fabrics before you buy. ... No. 1 ...

DUMARS:

"Judging Fabric Quality." Yes, that tells the story very well in pictures and words.

VAN DEMAN:

And "Women's Dresses and Slips: A Buying Guide."

DUMARS:

All right if I brief these titles to Judging Fabrics and Women's Dresses? That would make ordering easier for any of our Farm and Home friends who may want to write the Bureau of Home Economics for these two bulletins.

VAN DEMAN:

By all means. "Judging Fabrics and Women's Dresses" on a post card mailed to the Bureau of Home Economics here in Washington will be all that our mail room needs.

DUMARS:

Let's make sure everybody understands how to get these bulletins.

You'll send the bulletins--free of charge--to anybody who writes--Correct?

VAN DEMAN:

That's correct.

DUMARS:

All right then, Farm and Home Friends, if you want these bulletins, write on a card "Judging Fabrics and Women's Dresses", sign your name and address, and send the card to the Bureau of Home Economics, Washington, D. C.